

Section D-4

Family Readiness Program as a Liaison between Family Members, Unit, and Agencies

The contents of this Toolkit have been developed to assist you in your efforts to support family readiness. Every effort has been made to ensure that the information provided is current and accurate. However, because statutory and regulatory changes may have occurred since the publication of this Toolkit, the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs cannot assume responsibility for its continued accuracy. Before taking any significant action based on the contents of this Toolkit, you should contact a subject matter expert in your chain of command to secure the most current information.

Family Readiness Program as a Liaison between the Military Unit, Family Members and Community Organizations

Family readiness programs are the answer for coping with the unique challenges and demands of military life. Information, referral, and follow-up are the cornerstones of the family readiness program. Family readiness programs serve as a source of accurate information about resources and function as a liaison between the military unit, family members and community organizations. When a family member has a question, needs more information, or has a problem, a natural place for them to turn for assistance is the unit family readiness group (FRG) or family readiness program. As the family readiness program manager/director, you can point a family member in the right direction to obtain needed services or to resolve a problem. An assessment should be made of the family's needs and then appropriate services and resources can be recommended.

Your role as the family readiness program manager is crucial in presenting pertinent family needs and issues to the command. Ongoing leadership consultation and coordination of efforts facilitate timely responses to family problems and can promote preventive services and awareness of emerging concerns. Use the personal family information you obtain wisely. Keep the commander informed. Work together to identify and resolve the issues, and support families concurrently.

In addition to keeping the command informed about the concerns of families, the family readiness program conveys information to the families about the command, current military and civilian programs in the local area, and acts as an advocate for command families as appropriate. During a crisis, the family readiness program provides initial assistance, information, referral and support. Families may be referred to professional counselors and appropriate agencies as needed. The available resources consist of a comprehensive network of professionals and organizations that can provide assistance.

Studies have shown that a large percentage of family problems encountered during deployments are financial. Financial problems are commonly the first issue to surface after a deployment or mobilization. Too often service members deploy without completely explaining what bills need to be paid, when they are due, and how to pay them. Frequently, the remaining family member may not be used to being responsible for family financial matters and he or she may become overwhelmed with the responsibility coupled with the stresses of the separation. These financial problems can be avoided through prior planning and communication before the deployment. However, command and family readiness program awareness can help provide support and assistance that prevents any potential financial crisis.

Information and referral is extremely beneficial for spouses and families who may have language barriers or transportation issues. Family readiness programs can link family members to other family members and groups for foreign-born spouses. Transportation issues can be identified, and addressed. Be proactive and track the problems encountered, how they were addressed or resolved, and any follow-up information. Document the resources used, any requirements or

problems with specific referral agencies, and any lessons learned. Brief the commander regularly and keep him or her informed.

An important service you can play as a family program manager is building a family readiness database of key readiness indicators. This may help enhance readiness or provide valuable information for planning future programs. If a large percentage of family problems are financial, that is a red flag to develop and implement a strong financial management program, develop close coordination with your service relief society, and learn about your local community financial resources. Many installations and services have a foundation or are linked to an organization that will provide financial grants in times of need.

Work closely with your nearby Family Center (called the Fleet and Family Support Program in the Navy; Marine Corps Community Services in the Marine Corps; Family Support Center in the Air Force, and Army Community Service in the Army). They may be your closest and most comprehensive allies in serving Guard and Reserve members and his or her families. They have established programs in the areas of financial management, relocation, career development, spouse employment assistance, family advocacy, volunteer opportunities, and exceptional family members. Family Centers also provide a wide variety of free classes on pertinent topics to military life including stress management, parenting in a military family, personal communication, couples workshop, consumer advocacy, and leadership seminars. If you are not a member of an inter-service family assistance committee or if there is not one in your area, contact other service, component, or installation offices in your area and start one.

You are a liaison between the command, the service member and their family, and community resources. You are in a strategic position to promote family readiness and to serve as a strong advocate for self-reliant families.